

# Three Temples

by Daryl Waters

## 1. Ganymede

Clear sky, bright sun, the rich emerald of orange grove pierced here and there by the insistence of cherry- blossoms. I lay on the old stones of the temple, prisoner of mid-day Mediterranean heat, turning over in my mind whether to lunch in the village cafe or, as I was not particularly hungry, linger on to roast my northern paleness to an Aegean tan – and make do with a glass of cooled retsina in the tavern on the road back.

I opted for the latter, closed my eyes, felt the heat begin to prickle. What a sensuous spot Zeus had chosen for his shrine, a shrine dedicated to Ganymede, in fact. The cult continued – in the beautiful youths passing to and fro in the little village below, quite unconscious (or were they?) of the stirrings they provoked in this pale visitor's mind.

At last the thought of cooled wine stirred me out of my hypnotic lethargy. I stood, a whisper of wind rippling my shirt, and started down through the sacred grove to the taverna.

At first I thought it was closed. No matter, I sat at a table in the shade near the rear where I could breathe the magic scent of ripening oranges. Ganymede, I reflected, was more beautiful by far than any figure in that galaxy of females Zeus had serviced in all his various disguises. Perhaps the boy had once walked through this grove, breathed this air, lent it his loveliness. An old woman came and took my order; a few moments later a half-bottle of wine appeared and a glass was placed within my grasp. It was when the bearer turned that I wondered whether my reverie had somehow captured myth and brought it back in these sacred premises.

He could have walked right out of marble from some Antiquities museum: a classically beautiful face caught between childhood and youth, tight clothes over a body of grace and strength, masculine pride in the carriage of his head. The boy turned to watch me; I blushed and a shy smile broke in his questioning eyes.

I sipped my wine, not daring to break the magic of the moment in speech. The boy moved about the terrace, setting up tables for the evening crowd. I felt my blush deepen as his eyes met mine from time to time, amusement replacing his query.

At last the wine was gone and I rose to pay. I handed the boy my money, our fingers touching as he took the note. He offered change; I shook my head; he shrugged. Now I could estimate his age at twelve or thirteen. He was tanned as

I hoped one day to be myself and – the facts poured in – his legs were long, meeting at tight hips in a perfectly proportioned torso.

Idly the boy stroked the apex of his triangle there and said, “You have visited the temple?” The English words were soft and spoken with some difficulty.

“Yes.”

“Beautiful?” The boy's question opened up an eternity of meaning, especially when his eyes drew mine down to that idly working hand.

“Very.”

Suddenly animated, the boy threw back his head and said, much more quickly, “You know of the cave of Artemis?”

“No,” I said.

“It can be beautiful, too. It's not far and . . .”

The boy hesitated, unsure for a moment, until prompted, “Yes?”

“I can show you.”

“Good.”

The boy turned on his heel and I followed him through the tables, heard him say something in Greek to the old woman, and then I was out in the orange grove with him. He set off along an overgrown path, I following at his side and answering the few simple questions he put to me: where did I live, where in Greece had I been, where was I going and when? In turn I learned that the old woman in the taverna was the aunt of a brother-in-law of his mother's niece and that the boy – his name was Andreas – was just there on a visit from the neighboring village.

The sacred grove gave way to rocky ledges covered in sparse brush – goat country but with a view of the valley, the village and the blue Aegean worthy of the gods. As we climbed sweat gathered on my shoulders; I loosened a few buttons; the boy made motions for me to take right off the itchy garment, then stripped out of his own shirt and threw it over a tanned shoulder. Behind him, now, I watched beads of perspiration bubble on the warmed, smooth skin and trickle into the band of his shorts: every so often the boy snaked a finger inside and ran it around for coolness, but the finger lingered at the spine.

We came to a ledge with a “special” set of foot-holds. The boy grasped my hand to steady and instruct me. At his gentle strength I felt my stomach muscles tighten – and held to his hand long after the way became easier, merely letting the taut hold fall slack.

At last we scrambled over another ledge and, panting, looked into the mouth of the Cave of Artemis. But I never got any farther, for the boy threw himself on the grass and drew me down with him. I swung to sit up, but now I felt arms and legs wrap around me and lips seek with all their fresh, young strength, my mouth; the weight of him pushed me back again onto the grass. In sight of Artemis, above the temple of Zeus and Ganymede, the old myth was being replayed, in the rush of blood to our loins, in my capitulation. I felt the soft, pink Ganymede tongue gently explore at first the face it would make its own, touching, anointing my eyes, cheeks, nose before at last pushing past my lips to

enter and mate with mine.

His breath and his lip had the same ambrosian scent as the sacred grove, the mead of orange-honey. Through half-closed lids I saw, and savored, the magic of his dark eyes.

Hands unzipped our trousers; we shuffled out of what remained of our imprisoning dress. His hips danced into my hands to share in mutual preparations. For a moment I hesitated, but the hips danced harder, to trap my hand in the sacred apex of the aroused faun, even as my own readiness was explored and soothed with his magic touch.

Sun above, grass, becoming crushed, below, the young sweat of his body, the roused tautness of mine, the cool drops which seeped like an eternal spring from his lips, the scent of hair and boy-skin and orange blossoms, the smooth glide of limbs and ultimately the glide of man- flesh home in the dream of ancient right: Zeus in Ganymede. Waves of the wine-dark sea rose to that sacred hillside, broke over us once, twice, three times. Through an eternity of ecstasy we exhausted each other.

At last we dozed, together, and woke as a bee, gatherer of orange honey, buzzed about our heads. I sat up, dug into my rumpled trousers for a cigarette, lit one for me and another for the unabashed boy offering his naked body as a libation to the sun. He accepted, inhaled deeply, smiled.

“Why you move on tomorrow?” he asked.

“I’ve places to see,” I whispered, already becoming duskiely aroused again by the twitching muscles in one of his legs.

“There’s much to see *here*. And I have fourteen days of little vacation. We close the taverna tomorrow, because it’s market day and the old woman must shop, and I shall be alone.”

“Well, I don’t know...” I began.

“Please. The old woman thinks I will be safer with a guest to – guard me.” He smiled and languidly rolled his hips. “I can cook – too.”

I stayed a week, then another, a proud and honored guest at the little taverna which every night was rocked to sleep by the pulse of the love Andreas and I made in the small bed they let me share with him. I cannot believe the old woman didn’t know. Blessing of kindly people upon the transient miracle of boyhood? A recognition of old ways even more sacred than the Faith from Judea, older than the Homeric poems? At last Andrea’s mother returned to fetch him back to their village. I bade them good-by as they mounted a creaking bus, his mother full of profuse thanks for my love of her son. In full sight of the other passengers Andreas hung his arms about my neck and whispered in my ear, “Stay in my country. I’m not the only temple boy.” Then, in Greek, “Farewell.”

## 2. Torso

A cold breeze cut through the dull-green olive grove, whipped around the mottled columns of the temple. Here Zeus had once again materialized, my guide book said, this time as an eagle who mated (mechanics unexplained) with a wandering princess. The issue was a hero of such beauty and courage that his exploits rivaled those of even his august father – and for his trouble he was turned into a marigold. Locals, it seemed, still cultivated the flower for good luck, and as an aphrodisiac. A spray, in fact, had been on the table in my hotel foyer. Just that morning I had picked up a few blossoms and walked to the terrace to watch a pair of youths kicking a football around. One, who evidently lived near the hotel, I had seen several times before. Thumbing the delicate petals I had said to myself, “If you bring luck and heighten love, bring me this lad.” For a week of ruins in varying degrees of disrepair, under grilling Mediterranean sun or nasty little rain showers, had turned me into something of a cynic.

Certainly the marigold was present here, flowering amongst the olive trees and, as I climbed the old pediment, carpeting the temple as well: dull marigold standing boldly in the shadow of truncated columns and broken statuary. For an hour I was busy boxing the perimeter, examining the best of what remained. At last I sat, turned up the collar of my jacket against the persistent wind and consulted my guide once again. Leading directly away from me, under masses of myrtle, were the remnants of a stoa. The book said this ended in what once was a bath house, and that there were fragments of a *kouros* statue. One last look. I got up, absently followed the truncated capitals, ducking under rich green vines until eventually I found myself standing in a protected grove surrounded by broken pieces of statuary.

A torso lay on its side. I bent and ran my fingers over it – something you can never do in a museum – and felt in the old stone the tension of boy-muscle just growing into adolescence. This was no youth the sculptor had carved: it was a boy, at most thirteen.

A pale sun breaking through the moving leaves touched the stone even as my fingers did, making it ripple as flesh. I ran my hands down to the amputated legs. Who was the boy who had posed for this statue? Would he have been dark or fair? Was he slave or free? Was he...

I heard a rock scrape and tumble. I looked up and there, watching as I touched the nude *kouros*, was the boy I had seen playing football from the hotel terrace. He smiled, a smile of friendship, and hesitancy.

By now my fingers had come around the crudely fashioned stone twig protruding half-erect from the loins of the *kouros*; I ran my eye down the strengthening muscles in the spartan body of living boy: boy and marble, each echoing the spirit and mystery of the other. My fingertips stroked and caressed while the boy watched, one foot advanced.

“That's only stone,” the boy said at last.

I nodded. He approached shyly and sat down with his back to me and the wounded kouros.

“Was I wrong to follow you here?” he asked.

“No.”

“Spires told me you were watching me many days, and then I saw it too.”

“Are you a temple boy?” I asked.

“I come here sometimes when I want to be alone.”

“Or be with a tourist?”

The boy shrugged, and threw his head backwards as in an asking. A smile broke across his features and then I noticed his hand gently copying in himself my exploration of the kouros.

I seated myself beside him, extended an arm, which he moved into, slowly but with grace. The boy's smile broadened as his hand clasped my shoulder and drew me against him. His face tilted upward; a tongue pressed from flashing teeth. Gently I bent downward and kissed the half-opened lips – no mystery here, just warm, human, sun-scented boy – and reached down to encompass his vitality. In turn, the boy released *me*, and started to explore me with slightly roughened fingers; now I was the torso, the boy the visitor.

Carefully, with my free hand, I tamed the boy's eagerness without deterring it. He let me remove his clothes, and now I saw emerge, as the shirt and levi's fell to the ground, the same living beauty that was locked in the limestone lying beside us. In my hands it was once again warm pliancy. I lay back to let the boy stride me to discover what he would soon grow to.

What followed was unhurried, filled with memories, lit by my own pride and the sparkling eagerness of the boy to fulfill his destiny.

We dressed and I kissed the boy and we walked back through the grove. I lingered for a moment beside the torso and closed my eyes to try to lock everything into memory. Then I picked one of the marigolds which had been crumpled under our mating bodies and folded it, with a chip of limestone from the site, into a handkerchief still damp from where the boy had dried himself.

A few small transient physical things: a crushed flower, a fragment of stone, the evaporating coolness of a boy's pubertal seed, yet they told me more than a hundred novels about the Golden Age of Man.

### 3. Goat-boy

It had begun as a makeshift day, to kill time before I moved on to more interesting sites. The temple at Larissa had been disappointing; not so the sight of the old crusader castle crowning the hill above me. Now I was plodding

upwards toward it under a merciless sun along narrow, dusty streets.

I suppose I must have first noticed him when the town gave way to scrub: a spot on the hillside in the distance, surrounded by his herd, but he did not register, for I was more intent upon surviving the trek and the heat. My path climbed, dusty, dry, quiet, the air only disturbed by the occasional bird cry, the click of cicada. Below me the plain stretched empty toward the luminous distance.

It is strange how certain sites have the authority to command visiting. In part it's the fantasy of history replaying in the mind. What youths defended these crenelated walls? Where, and with whom, did they sleep during those long sieges when castle and compound became an island of male humanity?

Bells and a rough whistle arrested my reverie and then I came upon him busy chasing errant goats – it seemed as much a game as a task. He caught me watching him, smiled, then shrugged and dived after a kid that was determined to stray too far. But as he lunged he stumbled, rolled over and let out a string of what could only be curses before struggling up to glare at his herd, and even at me. I couldn't resist taking a snap-shot. When he saw what I was doing he looked away, perhaps out of shame over the poverty evident in his faded, tattered jeans and broken sandals.

Soon I was part of the herd, goats all about me with the boy behind clacking at us. We seemed, all of us, to be moving in the same direction. I stopped and turned. A shy smile broke over the boy's face. Several times as I continued my climb I looked back and saw that he was slowly gaining upon me. Each time our eyes met he turned his head aside as if considering a weighty problem, but always came that gentle smile.

Ushered upwards by this strange cortege I eventually reached the old stone walls and for a half-hour I busied myself climbing about the area seeking angles for my photo record. The problem with fortresses is that you are always looking up at them. Temples nestle into the land; castles command it. I walked to a neighboring ridge, however, one that would have rendered the site totally unsuitable for the age of artillery, and there I set up: tripod, yellow filter to bring out the distant clouds in the sky. But when I finally put my eye to the viewfinder, turned the lens to focus, I found the goatherd boy boldly in the center of my picture, a confident and somewhat naughty smile making the castle a mere background of stones.

Now a sort of trial of wills developed: I wanted a photograph of the castle and he was determined to feature in it. He won. Photo taken, he stepped away and allowed me to get on with what I wished.

It was odor more than anything else that made me realize he was standing at my side, eyes glued to the camera as I dismounted it from the tripod. Grubby fingers reached for it. I let him look through the viewfinder, heard his exclamation of wonder as he saw the castle leap toward him through the telephoto lens. Reluctantly he handed it back, roughened fingers lingering on mine, a yearning in his eyes for something in all likelihood he could never own.

The touch stirred me; I looked at him more closely: not beautiful, rather small and thin but rugged, eyes sparkling through tanned unwashedness.

Now he threw himself effortlessly at a goat. Tethered short, the animal dropped its head to munch and hardly seemed to notice as the boy felt its teats, professionally squeezed one to release a stream of milk, ducked his head under and took the next squirts directly into his mouth. Finished, the boy smiled, milk glistening around his lips, walked to me, dropped to his knees and stretched out luxuriantly in the sun.

A moment later his left hand came to his crotch and began to move there as though he were all alone on that sun-struck hillside. A shape appeared beneath his fingers and, catching me watching, he smiled. A thumb hooked the tab of his zip and ran it downward. The poor lad wore nothing beneath; out sprang the hardened flesh. As he eased the opening in his trousers apart he turned toward me and waited.

It was an offering. I took the gift, gently explored its growing force, felt it pulse in my hand, turned it this way and that, dry fingers rubbing smoothly over dry boy. He lay back in confidence, one hand shading his eyes from the midday sun. My own response, in resonance with his easy availability amongst those wandering goats, was immediate – and demanding. I drew him to me, rather roughly, I fear, and started to undo the top button of his trousers, but he pushed my hand aside, snaked away from me, shook his head and stood up. Then he caught the disappointment, and the fear, in my eyes, and smiled. His hand took mine, placed it *there* again (he hadn't bothered yet to zip up), and, pointing to the castle, hauled me to my feet.

He led me around the walls until a gap appeared. We scrambled through into a maze of tumble-stone buildings which he seemed to know well.

“Your goats?” I asked.

“They won't stray far,” he told me in a combination of Greek, English and hand motions. “Besides, you can help me find them later.”

We went to a doorway in the base of a ruined tower, entered gingerly over barbed wire strategically placed to keep people out, down some steps and into a cellar. My body luxuriated in the dark, sweet coolness but it took a moment before I could see that there was a crude bed in one corner – straw covered with rag sacks of some sort and the boy was standing before it.

One flick of grimy thumb at the top button of his jeans and, zip still agape, they fell to the floor. A marble godlet stepped out of them and toward me, bringing with him the rich aroma of sweat and hair and goat. And then his hands were on my clothes, fingers inside, pulling, releasing, until I, too, stood bare before him and he was on his knees surveying me with glistening eyes and, later, questioning mouth, where, earlier, in sunlight and on the hill, I had explored him.

It was no longer possible to keep apart. We fell on the bed: with a creak of branches, dry acrid dust rose from beneath to join the strong animal smell of the boy locking himself against me. We moved – how shall I say – with divine

grace or, on his part, an easy professionalism as natural as drawing milk from a ewe. It was, for me, over all too soon. But the boy wouldn't release me. As I tried to slip back into ecstatic torpor he mounted a fierce attack upon my mouth: strong white teeth breached my lips for his tongue to enter, inviting me to return the invasion; his hands were everywhere, on my arms, back, hair, coming even for a moment to touch my cheeks. With incredible speed my enthusiasm returned. Now he twisted himself and I saw that he was going to let me take him in the ultimate clasp of the gods.

I entered. He gave way, with a long, throaty sigh. Then we started the dance, the beat, the timeless ritual. I drove harder than I thought a boy of his age could ever endure, but with every increment in my abandonment he drove back at me, and there was a smile on his face twisting on the rags below – of triumph and pride in relinquishing to me his one precious possession. And so the power of Apollo rose in that dark Christian dungeon, blazed through our joined flesh and burst as a sun-burst, echoing, resonating between us, and then pulsed into peace.

I lay on the bed, toying with a force temporarily spent. The boy nestled in my arms, softened, warm, pliant. Watching him, I saw beauty enter and gently take possession of his face. Slowly he was transforming himself into something I knew I had to have, had to hold night after night, something that could not be released after one brief encounter on a makeshift bed in a ruined tower.

“Won't your father miss you soon?” I asked.

“I don't have a father,” the boy answered, “or a mother.”

“Who do you stay with, then?”

“My uncle.”

“Won't he worry?”

The boy looked suddenly sad, shook his head and made little motions with his finger upon my breast.

We stayed there all afternoon, pulses of ecstatic sex interspersed by dozing, stroking, holding, whispering. And by the time we emerged into the sunlight again I had worked out a plan.

Just now I heard the door slam; Nikos is home. I look up from the Telly to see my Greek 'nephew', transformed from odorous goatherd to English school-boy, coming to plop himself down on the sofa beside me. Soon he will drop his head in my lap. In the last two years Nikos has lost none of his affectionate nature, or his enthusiasm. We do not hear often from his uncle: with a large family of his own, he had been all too glad to sign over guardianship of the orphaned boy in exchange for the purchase of a used tractor; when we visited Greece last year we didn't even go near Larissa for fear our dream would end.

Yet the past is precious. I still drink retsina, in honor of Andreas, occasionally; I keep the chip of marble from the *kouros* site. And in my wallet I carry a photo of a ragged goat-boy defying me to take his picture against the crenelated wall of *his* castle.